

**CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**PUBLIC WORK SESSION**

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13, 2011**

**WILLIAM A. BRIGGS BUILDING (REED CONFERENCE ROOM)**

**845 PARK AVENUE**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION: 6:00 PM**

**PUBLIC WORK SESSION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE  
SESSION**

**PUBLIC SESSION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING PUBLIC MEETING**

**MINUTES**

The public work session was held on the evening of the above date in the Reed Conference Room at the William A. Briggs Building, with the following members present: Chairperson Iannazzi, Mr. Lombardi, Mrs. Ruggieri, Mrs. Culhane, Mr. Bloom and Mrs. McFarland (Mr. Traficante was absent with cause). Also present were Mr. Nero, Dr. Lundsten, Mr. Balducci, Mr. Votto, Mr. Dillon, Mrs. Nota-Masse and Attorney Cascione.

Executive Session was called to order at 6:00 p.m. pursuant to RI State Laws PL 42-46-5(a)(1) Personnel; PL 42-46-5(a)(2) Collective Bargaining and Litigation (Contract Negotiations' Update – Bus Drivers/Trades People/Mechanics, Custodians); (Teacher Negotiations; Teacher Assistants/Technical Assistants/Bus Aides Arbitration Award).

## **Call to Order – Public Session**

**The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.**

**Roll Call – A quorum was present**

**Chairperson Iannazzi reported that Mr. Traficante is traveling out of town.**

## **Public Work Session:**

### **a. Policy for “Tutoring Guidelines”, (New) Policy #5112.3**

**Mrs. Nota-Masse presented the committee with the New Tutoring Policy Guidelines that she developed and reviewed with Dr. Lundsten and Attorney MaryAnn Carroll.**

**Mrs. Nota-Masse – The reason that I started looking at a Tutoring Policy is the documents that we have are somewhat antiquated for some of the needs of students most recently. I’m starting to get letters from doctors of all sorts – with one sentence, “Student can’t come to school” and they expect to be tutored at home. We’re running into problems especially at the high school level where doctors of all sorts are writing letters saying that kids can’t come to school after the student has been absent from a truancy point of view, i.e., “Student can’t come to school and tutoring is necessary”. There are no evaluations or no plan for treatment – nothing. I’m**

starting to see a trend, especially on one particular side of the City. What's happening is that doctors are writing these very casual letters with no follow-up and nothing to it and we don't necessarily have a policy to get what is "legitimate", which I hate to use that word because I'm not a doctor. When a child has surgery and is going to be out for six (6) weeks and has a clear plan for coming back to school or they break a leg and they can't get on the bus to come to school; that is a very clear and cut reason why the child cannot come to school. What I'm finding is a Reactive letter from a pediatrician saying, "The child has some kind of PTSD". The child's been absent on and off for a year and a half and now this one sentence letter comes.

This is where it's coming from that we need to work carefully, look at where the letters ...what's precipitating the increase in tutoring. Again, I took all of the documents that we had here, put them all together, sent it to the lawyer; she made a couple of adjustments and sent it back to me. The back page grid is what we are legally responsible for. Over the past year, I have sent a couple of letters to parents saying with the increased graduation requirements, if you have a Sophomore or a Junior who is not in school, we are only obligated up to one (1) hour per subject of tutoring. In some subjects.....We are doing a disservice by giving them six (6) hours of tutoring and expecting them to keep up with the graduation requirements. On the other hand we have a couple of students who haven't stepped foot in the school for two years. I think it behooves

us to make sure that we're giving them the appropriate access and opportunities to get the same education that we are expecting all the other children to have.

**Mrs. Culhane:** What is the law for that? At what point is a child truly truant and then the parent is suddenly on the hook. It says State Law but ...so you're telling us two years; so what's the proper time.

**Mrs. Nota-Masse:** I called RIDE and asked their legal department specifically if there were any rules around tutoring. They said, "No". So, it's a district decision. Then I went to our own school committee policies and all we have is that children should be in school and when that's not necessary, every effort will be made. I couldn't change much based on the law and what we have currently. That's where this is stemming from.

**Mr. Nero:** To address this even more, Judy and I deal with a lot of these issues of forcing the parents into truancy when they don't do it and they become...you go to court and we're fighting the battle all the time. The kids should be in school and sometimes the judge rules that they should be in school and sometimes they rule to give them one more chance and one more opportunity. I've had a lot of incredibly strange cases when I was at Western Hills.

A lengthy discussion ensued making changes, etc. to this policy.

**Mrs. Coogan added: I get impacted because they are students with an IEP. We have people who aren't qualified to make a determination for students, i.e. a licensed social worker – a counselor who are sending letters and they're not even telling the reason why they think the student should be out; they are just saying the student needs tutoring. Parents are approaching them and asking for this letter and it's not ethical in all honesty. But we're also dealing with parents who have kids that don't want to come to school and they know if they don't get a doctor's note of support, they keep being out for another issue or we have people that are recommending students have anxiety. We feel that the student needs to come to school and work through anxiety and learning how and that's where we would look at a reduced school day using a little bit of tutoring to support them. Maybe by putting them in the planning center, etc. would help and let us do what we're supposed to do.**

**Mrs. Nota-Masse – Parents won't even discuss with the guidance counselors or with the schools that their child is having issues and if the school could accommodate their issues. They are just going right by that and going to a doctor and stating that the child can't come to school. Many of them, once we receive a release....I talked to a counselor last week and stated that a child is not getting an appropriate public education and she answered that she agreed.**

**Mr. Lombardi – A suggestion in the wording of Page 2, fourth paragraph, "If attempts fail to keep a child in school and homebound**

tutoring is appropriate and necessary, the following criteria must be met". The reverse should be made: "If this criterion is met, then homebound tutoring is appropriate. Mrs. Nota asked, "How about consideration for homebound tutoring". That would be the way it should be written.

Mr. Lombardi noted that on Page 2 Under Item c, perhaps we could ask what the other factors are in considering home tutoring eligibility.

Mrs. Nota-Masse – The other one would be, for example, "patterns of attendance", because we do have several students who for years, and we're working on one specifically that has been a truancy issue since she was in elementary school with Judy. We would look at the counselors' recommendations; we would look at if all attempts have been made to give a reduced schedule. A change will be made to this item.

Mr. Bloom – It will also self-select because if they know that that's what they have to have and they can't meet it, you may not even be dealing with it.

Dr. Lundsten – The other thing you need to be aware of is the youngster or the family who may be taking advantage of this in an inappropriate way. They will not call the tutor. The tutor will show up at the house and they won't be there and then we're still responsible

for paying the tutor hence the paragraph on the last page that if the parent cancels more than three (3) times the tutoring schedule will be suspended. It's really an essential piece to this because there needs to be responsibility on both sides of this.

Mrs. Nota-Masse – To that we have one particular tutor who says to parents not to worry about it if they cancel; that he would just keep going over the summer. They don't have the authority to do that because again, I'm looking at it that they have six weeks; so that person could be getting paid for the cancellation and additionally paid in the summer without any actual tutoring. Part of this is also my goal to have some kind of accountability system put in so if a parent cancels, they call us not the tutor because I can't get verification of what's going on. Just today I was looking at two tutoring cards. The person put down that he had two separate children in two separate locations at the same time.

Lizbeth Larkin requested from the chair if she can say something: I totally understand what you're saying because when a child goes MIA, those children are still on the roster at the schools. With going forward with Teacher Evaluations, if the Commissioner still pushes the linkage; if that should be the case, what we struggle with is the fact that those zeros count for the NECAP scores because we're penalized for having them on our rosters and they count as zeros. These parents that are keeping their children out chronically and there's no re-course for the school department and it's starting very,

very young and we're seeing more and more and there's really no truancy condition until they really get to middle school and then you start going into the truancy court. People are really frustrated because those are the things they can't control.

Mrs. Nota-Masse – The truancy court, since it's inception at East, has been in handcuffs. This one particular parent has not shown up for all of the requests of Magistrate Palous. You have to go down to Family Court and then miraculously a physician's letter appears that has no meat to it. There are children with legitimate issues that this is for, as to speak. It's a safety net for the ones that are taking advantage of our good nature. Also, if this passes with your blessing, I also need to look at how the grading system is done because we have, again, in some cases teachers who are not certified in a certain area because we can't get certified people to tutor. So, we have somebody who may not be certified in English, tutoring in English. That child is getting a grade and now the teacher of record is stating that he/she may not know .....that's an outgrowth of this which eventually I'll get to but I needed something to move forward with.

Mrs. McFarland: I have two questions. The first one being, we talked mainly about physicians but you talked earlier about MSW's and Counselors. You're not accepting notes from them; it has to come from physicians so it has to be something that's been determined either .....



**Mrs. Nota-Masse – Because physicians do more of the in-depth evaluations and again, if a social worker is treating a child for insurance or say that the family can't go, this one particular counselor that I spoke to said that the parent has gone to two other physicians; the physicians have told her to use XYZ and the parent has not done that. But she's going to the social worker and she said that she knows this child needs evaluations, which triggers us to say that we're going to pay for an evaluation for a child, which is fine and our responsibility, but I think that the non-physicians are awfully quick to just dash off a note without knowing the full impact of the child's education.**

**Mrs. McFarland: So this would insure that only a physician can give you a note. Right now you're accepting them from other means. Mrs. Nota agreed with Mrs. McFarland.**

**Lizbeth Larkin – Teachers are preparing lessons to go to people who are truly in some hospital program or whatever.**

**Ms. Nota-Masse reiterated that she is trying to do what is best for the student and not being in school and expecting to pass or graduate with any kind of skills, most fundamental job that we have is to graduate and be a functional developmental society. This isn't doing it.**

**Mrs. McFarland added that these students are actually going to college unprepared; they haven't met the requirements of completing**

what they needed to do at high school to get them to college and now they're spending two years making up all of those requirements and they're spending somewhere between \$3,000 to \$6,000 on doing all of that.

Mrs. Nota-Masse noted that she is concerned about our liability if we allow a child to never step foot in a high school and give them a diploma.

Mrs. McFarland – My second question was, when we pass some of these things, do we automatically implement them. Mr. Nero answered that this would be implemented at the beginning of next year for a fresh start.

Mrs. Nota-Masse added that, also, if a parent applied for it they would get a document outlining all the requirements and expectations and the tutoring of X, Y, Z. It's just too easy right now to get it and I don't feel equipped with what we have to make a qualification on whether they get it or don't.

Mrs. Ruggieri – On any of the other services that they require, is that above and beyond the five hours. Mrs. Coogan answered that it would be on the IEP.

Mrs. Ruggieri asked how much the school department is spending currently on services. Mrs. Nota-Masse noted that this was also one

of her questions when beginning this process. As of this year, to date, it is budgeted to various line items under 504 per school but it is approximately \$80,000.

A discussion ensued regarding the 80% of this figure that is not being abused and being well-spent. The amount of students this total involves is unknown at this time. Mrs. Nota-Masse will find this out for the committee commenting that it does change weekly.

Mrs. Culhane – This whole issue with the parent that they can't find; can they put some kind of caveat in there that says, "The parent may be asked for another doctor's letter". That might be invidious to not cancel if they know they have to pay another co-pay or go get another letter....because the doctor may very well say, "Why don't you have the student in school?"

Mr. Lombardi – I think that when you develop the tutorial plan, this particular section should be signed by the parent. Now the parent agrees to it contractually.

Mrs. Culhane – With these tutors, how are they checking in that they have tutored? Does the parent sign a form so we know where they are? Mrs. Nota-Masse: The parent is supposed to sign a card, like a time card, saying that they tutored with a particular child at a particular date and time. What I'm running into is students signing off on a card because a parent is not there to sign. Especially at the

high school level.

**Mrs. Culhane – We may very well be spending some of that money on tutoring that has never happened, so how are we insuring that we're not paying people who aren't actually tutoring. A discussion ensued regarding this issue.**

**Mrs. Nota-Masse – Another issue that has grown from this is does the teacher grade it or does the tutor grade it. What grade is put on the report card? This is a legitimate concern.**

**Mrs. McFarland – Then it goes back to Mrs. Larkin's concern that the teacher in the classroom that's actually.....it has to go back to the classroom teacher because she's the one that is ultimately responsible and this child will ultimately return to that classroom or that subject, etc. I really think that would be a way of covering it.**

**Mrs. Culhane – Mrs. Larking brought up a very good point. If you have a student that is supposed to be in a classroom and they are not present for the NECAP's; that's a zero. Do we have any process that say, "After so much time of non-return" kicks a student out of that classroom to alleviate that kind of issue? Mrs. Nota-Masse noted that the school department can seek a waiver if a child has a legitimate medical condition which over the years I had to sign waivers. We have to prove beyond a reasonable doubt; it is very difficult to do.**

**At this time, it was noted that the committee will take the agenda out of order and have Mr. Zisseron speak on the Capital Budget.**

#### **Capital Budget – Mr. Zisseron**

**At this time, documents were handed out in reference to the Stadium and Stone Hill School deteriorating parking lots and grounds paving and asphalt.**

**Mr. Lombardi – In reference to what came out in the Council meeting; when the Mayor presented his budget he said Park View Windows but the paving/asphalt was also included in his budget, but he only talked about the Park View windows.**

**Mrs. McFarland – My only concern for Stadium is that we were also going to talk about repaving the other parking lot area to make more parking for the teachers. If you're going to do it, this is only a small little spot.**

**Mr. Zisseron – We are going to see if it is within ...what I'm hoping is; we put \$90,000 for both of them. They both have to be torn up, re-graded, drainage, etc. I'm hoping there's going to be enough money to do that small former playground area. Mrs. McFarland – When you talk about the drains at Stadium you know that it's also the wall that's deteriorating as well. A discussion ensued regarding these problems with drainage at Stadium.**

**Mr. Bloom – I had asked you to pull together a list of all the Capital Projects that had been proposed in the three prior years and a number of them (and I had prepared a spread sheet which I had forwarded to you) can you comment on any of those and confirm which ones have not been completed and which ones are to be completed.**

**Mr. Zisseron – The problem is that every year we have to do this five year program for City Planning. We may have projects that we'd like to see done. It's up to City Planning to recommend to the Mayor's budget whether these projects are going to be approved or not. Also, if there is money for these projects. The last couple of years the City has basically put a freeze on our Capital Budget spending. If you look back, the only ones that have been done is the Bain Sprinkler System because that was mandated by the Fire Marshall, WHMS, West and this year they gave us \$175,000 to replace the roof at Bain, which is out to bid now. That is just over the Science Wing. The main building was replaced a number of years ago. Those are the only projects they've given us. They approved Science rooms but the City never sold the bond.**

**Mr. Bloom – That's the question that I'm trying to get a handle on. This budget which I believe was submitted to the Mayor, doesn't have the Science Labs and as near as I can tell, based upon the information that we prepared for the last three years, there are other projects; there's at least 8-10 from what I could tell that we had put on**

the list, submitted in 08-09, 09-10, 10-11, which were not completed and would still be open but seem to have disappeared.

Mr. Zisseron – Everything with us is a priority. One year there may not be money for it and the following year you may see something else become a priority. One of the problems are we ran out of repair and renovation money. Because they did not sell off that 9.5 million dollar bond, repair and renovation bond had to absorb Western Hills and Bain. That's where the money went.

Mrs. McFarland – This is a concern that I have; that you have taken these away.

Mr. Bloom – For instance Bain in 2008-2009 we submitted a request to replace the windows and as near as I can tell, the windows weren't replaced. I could be wrong on that, but we submitted that. We submitted a proposal to renovate the library; we submitted a proposal to renovate the Science rooms and the same thing for Western Hills. We submitted a \$300,000 proposal three years ago for this year to replace asbestos tiles in corridor at Cranston East. I could be wrong; maybe those were taken care of but if they haven't been taken care of, they have fallen off the radar and if it's an asbestos issue, I think the School Committee needs to know. I think that if a proposal has been submitted in terms of a Capital Project, that it should keep coming forward and at least be said, "We are taking this off the list", not just disappearing, which would be something that the School Committee

is aware of and can be addressed with constituents that put us here and give them an answer as to why it's coming off.

Mr. Zisseron – Cranston East corridor floors asbestos were replaced.

Mr. Bloom – What I would like to know is if this list is accurate. I don't know if it is accurate. I went through this list as best as I can. I would appreciate it if you would comment on whether or not this is accurate; whether or not these projects that were put on there in previous years have been completed. I have a whole stack of projects; what's the priority. What's your priority for getting them done? We have to know what we think are the priorities. We can change them.

Mr. Zisseron – The priority is Park View windows, which has been a part of the Mayor's budget presentation. They're either screwed tight or you open them and they fall out. That is a priority. The two parking lots/playgrounds are a priority because of safety issues for kids. That's what I presented. If the City sold a \$9 million dollar bond, and I put \$9 million worth of projects on for next year, they wouldn't do it because they have other bonds that they want to use for their projects. You try to keep the school department bond somewhere around \$2 million because if they're going to retire \$5 million, if you're lucky, they issue \$5 million in bonds. It's a matter of you're not going to get the full million in one shot so you might



**spread it over two, three or four years.**

**Mr. Bloom – All we're trying to do is get a comprehensive picture on what the Capital Budget is; what was proposed; an explanation as to why it is not on there any more. I thought the labs at Park View were done.**

**Mr. Zisseron – Three years ago, the Park View, Bain, and WHMS Science rooms were approved by the School Committee, Planning Commission and presented in the Mayor's budget and passed by the City Council. Now, there is \$1.7 million to do this project but the City never sold the bond. Mrs. McFarland feels that that project's dead now because they did not do it in a budget year so therefore you have to go back and ask for it again. I checked with a couple of people from the City and that Project...the money has still been authorized but they still haven't sold the bond. That's why you don't see it.**

**A lengthy discussion ensued regarding the Capital budget, bonds, etc.**

**Mr. Bloom – Joel, you're double counting. If the City is only going to sell \$2 million worth of bonds to fund a project for us and that's on this submittal here and we have science labs that they've approved; they're not going to fund it because it's more than the \$2 million. We have to have one or the other. Either everything is there or if it doesn't get funded it gets carried forward or we're not presenting a**

proper picture. If these projects have been completed from the list and then I think that if they're not completed we need to know. The priorities may change. We're going to rely on your judgment to tell us what the priority is, but if there are things that are approved that the constituents are expecting to get funded then we have to hold the City Council and the Mayor responsible for following through. That's our job. It would be the responsibility of the district to be continuing to bring those things forward and so we can follow through and make sure you get what you need in order to make sure the students are taken care of properly.

Mr. Zisseron – I will give you a list.

Mrs. McFarland – I was just going to try to explain it to you in this sense, Joel, that if Bain Middle School windows were a priority two years ago, and they didn't get done and they were in dire straights and they were falling out; and they haven't got done and were never bonded, aren't they still a priority today? Now we're moving to Park View and saying their windows are falling out and they are a priority but forget about Bain because that was two years ago when I was there as part of that planning commission and made that. I'm no longer a council member; I'm no longer there. That budget's been closed, those books have been audited and they've moved on. Once they close the books, you can't go back and ask for the money; you have to re-ask for the money and get it authorized by the next council because I'm no longer there. I'm only as good as when I serve; that

body's gone and the next body moves in. They don't even know it existed that I did that work. They would have to go back into the minutes of those meetings for both the Planning Commission that I served on and to the City Council to even say that any of those items existed. Those council members now don't even know; without having the historical knowledge, nobody knows. It's not ok.

A lengthy discussion ensued.

### **Food Service Financials**

At this time, Mr. Balducci distributed to the committee a copy of "Cranston Public Schools, Food Service Budget – Year to Date Activity (March 2011) – 2010-2011.

Mr. Balducci addressed the committee by stating that what they are attempting to do is to show the relationship between the Food Service Program, our management company, Sodexo, the school district and where we stand combined. At this time, Mr. Balducci explained the hand out to the committee (Please see hand out – on file in the Superintendent's Office).

Mr. Balducci noted that if you look at the column at the very right, the Combined column, I'm here standing before you tonight that the Food Service Program is running a surplus of \$107,000 through March. I haven't been able to say that in at least four years. Maybe even longer.

**Mr. Nero added that it may be eight or nine years because you at one time had a surplus of ½ million dollars.**

**Mrs. Ruggieri – In regards to the point of sales system which turned out that we needed to do upgrades with that because our buildings were not .....your answer at the time, was that we would be paying 50% of approximately \$10,000 - \$11,000. In here it's \$14,000? Mr. Balducci answered that "no" we haven't even paid that expense yet. That \$14,000 is actually the courier that we've not paid to date. A discussion ensued in regards to the Food Service Financials.**

**Mrs. Ruggieri – As far as the improvements that they were supposed to be doing in all of our schools, I had asked for some type of schedule or some type of something to see what they had done or what is going to be done and in here as part of this budget under Sodexo Activity, is any of this improvements that have been made? Mr. Balducci answered that it is very little of that.**

**Mrs. Ruggieri – When is the contract actually going to be coming up? Mr. Balducci noted that they are actually trying to schedule a meeting for the week after next. Mrs. Ruggieri requested a schedule of improvements that they have agreed to make with all the financials for the next contract. Mr. Balducci stated that as part of their agreement, they will be presenting this in their budget, which we have to agree to that budget based on assumptions that they're making**

**based on enrollment; based on free and reduced estimates, etc. Mrs. Ruggieri reiterated that she would like to see this sooner rather than later.**

**There being no further business to come before the School Committee a motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Lombardi and seconded by Mrs. Ruggieri. All were in favor.**

**The meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Frank Lombardi**

**School Committee Clerk**

## **POLICY #5112.3**

### **Tutoring Policy**

**In accordance with state law, the student's home school will make every attempt to accommodate the student's illness, while keeping them in school as much as possible. Consideration will be given to an abbreviated schedule, use of the school's planning center (if applicable), and accommodations within the schedule for therapeutic**

**time, etc., to enable the student full access to the curriculum and instruction offered by the district.**

**It is important to consider that any time out of school, especially at the high school level, could negatively affect a student's ability to complete state-mandated graduation requirements. Students are expected to be in school in order to have access to a full range of educational opportunities, which tutoring cannot provide. For example, if a student needs tutoring in Chemistry, it is extremely difficult to replicate effectively the laboratory experiences that a child would have in a classroom setting.**

**It is the belief of this district that student's should have every opportunity to be in school to fully access all of the educational opportunities that a classroom and school setting offers. Please consider this when deciding on the appropriateness of tutoring.**

**If attempts fail to keep the child in school, and homebound tutoring is appropriate and necessary, the following criteria must be met:**

**a. Parent/guardian must provide the school with a physician's letter stating that the child has been examined and a determination has been made that the child cannot attend school full-time for at least twenty (20) consecutive school days, due to a medical diagnosis. This letter should clearly include such diagnosis of the student's illness, and course of treatment to assist the child in returning to school. It**

**should also state an expected time for student to return to school.**

**b. Physician's notes on prescription pads will not be accepted.**

**c. The physician's letter will be one of the factors in considering home tutoring eligibility.**

**d. Parents will be required to sign a medical release for the district to contact the physician, have the physician provide a diagnosis and if necessary, coordinate with the district to provide an appropriate program for your child.**

**e. The district will have discretion to forward the physician's request to the district's medical staff (i.e. district physician, psychiatrist, etc.) for review and input.**

**f. If the Superintendent or his/her designee makes a determination that a student must receive home tutoring for a period of time, the approval will be given in accordance with the physician's plan for treatment and diagnosis for approximate time of absence from school. The maximum will be one quarter's time (45 days) with a potential for extension, if medically necessary and with appropriate updated evaluations. Parent/guardian will be required to provide the district with an updated physician's letter when seeking an extension.**

**g. Tutoring sessions shall occur outside of the student's home (hospital, local library, etc.), unless the student is physically unable to leave home.**

**If the above criteria is met, the district will arrange a schedule of tutoring with the following time allotments:**

**Grade Level Kindergarten Elementary Middle/High School**

**Time 2.5 hours/week 5 hours/week 1 hour per subject up to a maximum of 6 hours per week**

**If the parent cancels more than three (3) times, the tutoring schedule will be suspended. It may be reinstated if the sending school meets with the parent to discuss why the sessions were cancelled and to verify that home tutoring is still an appropriate option for the student.**

**The district will make every attempt to find a highly qualified and/or certified person to tutor in an academic area. Exceptions will be made only by the Executive Director of Educational Programs.**



**POLICY ADOPTED: CRANSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**RESOLUTION NO. CRANSTON, RHODE ISLAND**